

Moleskine notebooks

It's the promise held in that unbroken spine, the smooth oilskin cover, the comforting rounded corners. But most of all in the pristine ivory blankness, ready to be filled with the beginnings of your first bestseller and sketches so groundbreaking they will require new ways of thinking about art. This notebook, the [Moleskine pocketone](#) you just paid £8.99 for, will deliver it all.

Apparently Van Gogh used one, and Picasso, and Hemingway – this history now rests in your hands. So long as you can find a spot in Caffè Nero and get to work. "It's a masterful bit of excavation of the human psyche," says Stephen Bayley, the design critic and writer – and user of Moleskines. "The stuff you're writing in it could be the most brainless trivia, but it makes you feel connected to Hemingway."

Except there is no real connection to Hemingway. Moleskine was created in 1997, based on a description of the beautiful, bound notebooks the travel writer [Bruce Chatwin](#) bought from a French bookbinder before it closed down. An Italian company Modo & Modo recreated it, sold it at a premium price and describes it as a "legendary notebook". "It's an exaggeration," Francesco Franceschi, co-owner of Modo & Modo told the New York Times in 2004. "It's marketing, not science. It's not the absolute truth."

But it has worked. In the last 10 years, sales have grown, last year's profits were €28.5m and there are plans to float Moleskine, which could value it at £240m (to further remove it from its artistic aspirations, it was acquired by a private equity firm in 2006). Interestingly, in this old-fashioned notebook's lifetime, it has been the internet and bloggers (not least its own blog and Flickr group), which helped turn it into a cult product.

"Somebody saw a fabulous opportunity and exploited it brilliantly," says Bayley of Moleskine's "heritage", pointing out other manufacturers such as Leuchtturm, a German manufacturer of similar notebooks that has been going since 1917. But does any of this matter? The notebooks are good quality and a pleasure to write in and, as Bayley says, "there aren't many things you can buy for £10 that are the best of their kind. I buy them compulsively. It makes you think you are just about to write, for once, something brilliant."

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/shortcuts/2012/jun/19/joy-moleskine-notebooks>